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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, February 19, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "BEAUTY TREATMENTS FOR CITRUS FRUITS." Information from the Food and Drug Administration, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Some girls have rosy cheeks because nature makes them that way. Others have cheeks just as bright without the help of nature. You remember the old lines --

"Little bits of powder,
Little dabs of paint
Make a girl's complexion
Look like what it ain't."

Nowadays, that goes for girls -- and oranges. Women are not the only ones who are taking beauty treatments these days and acquiring a natural-looking bright color. Oranges, not favored by nature with an orange-colored skin, are having their complexions touched up, too. But if you were to write a rhyme about oranges, you would probably change the first lines to --

Little whiffs of ethylene,
Little baths in dye.

Oranges don't use powder, rouge or lipstick. But they often acquire an orange color by an ethylene-gas treatment; or a period of waiting in a warm, damp atmosphere; or even by a bath in orange-colored dye.

Seems to me the same reason lies behind all beauty treatments. Women find that touching up their color makes them more attractive. And dealers in oranges say that oranges sell better -- have more "appeal" or "it" or whatever you want to call it, if they have a bright color.

Most housewives buy fruit by color. They are in the habit of relying on color as an indication of ripeness and flavor in fruit. But actually color is not a very reliable gauge with some fruits -- citrus fruits especially. Some oranges and lemons are ripe and ready to eat before their color has changed. One variety of orange is often greenish when ripe. But just the same, we want our oranges an orange color and our lemons lemon-yellow. Because people generally buy by color, good oranges of a greenish hue don't sell as the orange oranges do.

So years ago, investigators discovered a clever way to give all oranges -- and some other fruits, too -- popular complexions. In brief, they discovered a way to speed up nature's coloring methods after the oranges were picked. They put the oranges in a chamber of ethylene gas. The gas faded the green color from the fruit but left the yellow or red shades. Actually this is just what happens

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when leaves turn in the fall or fruit ripens. The green color simply fades and the other colors remain. Nature makes this color change slowly. Ethylene gas does it rapidly. Nature's ripening process not only affects the color of fruit, but quality and flavor, too. Ethylene gas affects color only.

Well, on oranges that are mature and ready to eat, this de-greening process, carefully done, is not harmful. It is simply a method of giving good fruit color-appeal to the buyer. The Department of Agriculture recognizes it as a legitimate trade practice for mature fruit. But the Department forbids the gas treatment on unripe fruit to make it appear ripe. Food and Drug officials are continually on the lookout for unripe fruit in interstate trade that is artificially colored to make it look mature. Various State authorities, and also the progressive members of the citrus-fruit industry fully realize the disadvantages to the business of shipping inferior fruit under a color disguise, so they have done their part to keep it off the market.

So much for the gas beauty treatment. Now a second coloring method, sometimes used and legitimately used, is holding the ripe fruit for a short time in a warm, damp atmosphere when nature has been tardy or has otherwise slipped up on her coloring job. The only effect here is to hasten the development of the natural color of the fruit. Nobody could object to a beauty treatment as simple and natural as this -- just warm, moist air to bring out color.

But the latest in complexion treatment for oranges is dyeing or staining. The fruit takes a bath in harmless, coal-tar dye and comes out with a bright even orange color. This new treatment might be called a "Florida facial" for oranges because it has been used most in that State. It first came into general use in 1934. Experts estimate that 90 percent of the current Florida crop will be stained.

What is the opinion of the food control men in the Department of Agriculture about this type of complexion treatment for fruit? Well, I may as well tell you that they don't think much of it, although they have no evidence that the artificial color is not perfectly wholesome. Up to now, they have not been able to prohibit the use of this harmless coal-tar coloring, providing the color doesn't conceal immature fruit, and providing each separate dyed orange, is labeled by an ink-stamp to show that it has been colored artificially.

Before the dyeing practice got under way, the Department warned the citrus industry about labeling all dyed oranges, and about not using the color to conceal inferiority in fruit. Then, officials started an investigation to decide whether color added to fruit legally mature might also conceal inferiority. Complaints against this added color have been pouring into the Department from housewives and other consumers who, in spite of the label, have been deceived about the quality of oranges. So, after September, 1936, officials will take action against all stained oranges in interstate shipments, if the stain conceals inferiority either in the maturity or the variety of the fruit.

And that's all the news I have today about beauty treatments for citrus fruits.

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